. **Sexuality in a Criminal Justice Curriculum:**
A study of student conceptualisations of gay identity

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Heteronormative discourses provide the most common lens through which sexuality is understood within university curricula. This means that sexuality is discussed in terms of categories of identity, with heterosexuality accorded primacy while all 'others' are indeed 'othered'. This article draws on research carried out by the authors in a core first year university ethics class, in which a fictional text was introduced with the intention of unpacking these discourses. An ethnographic study was undertaken where both students and teachers engaged in discussions over, and personal written reflections on, the textual content. In reporting the results of that study this article uses a post-structural framework to identify how classroom and textual discourses might be used to break down socially constructed categories of sexuality and students' conceptualisations of non-heterosexual behaviour. It was found that engaging in discussion in the context of the fictional text allowed some students to begin to recognise their own heteronormative views and engage in an informed critique of them.

Keywords: heteronormativity, sexuality, pedogogy, discourses, otherness

Introduction

Heteronormative discourses are endemic within university curricula. Sexuality is discussed in terms of categories of identity, with heterosexuality accorded primacy and non-heterosexualities tending to be 'othered'. The purpose of this article is to explore how undergraduate university students in a criminal justice course conceive

of and understand sexuality (particularly non-heterosexualities), how they construct their understandings of gay identities, and how they use these identities in their interactions with non-heterosexualities. While there is a small amount of research on homophobia in the general population[1] and in schools[2] there has been very little Australian research on student attitudes to sexuality. The most notable is a now dated study of gay and lesbian stereotypes by Heaven and Oxman.[3] Indeed, there is very little Australian research on attitudes toward sexuality at all, and these also tend to be dated[4] or else focus on violence or health issues.[5] Given that the university classroom provides the structure through which future generations of professionals enter the workforce, research in this context is important in gauging how professionals from all walks of life come to think as they do, and to have the attitudes they have, particularly with respect to attitudes towards disadvantaged groups such as sexual minorities. This is especially important in regards to criminal justice professionals, as they have a major social role in addressing or perpetuating the social and criminal injustice experienced by disadvantaged groups. In this sense, understanding the way that future criminal justice students engage with discourses surrounding sexuality is a social justice issue.

The research considered here therefore addresses a much-ignored gap, and complements international research on the subject. Most of that research – and there is very little of it as well – on undergraduates' attitudes toward sexuality, has been conducted in the United States, and each of these studies has been quantitative. For example, Ventura, et al. conducted a survey of 484 students, comparing attitudes of those majoring in criminal justice fields to non-criminal justice students. [6] They found that criminal justice students tended to have more negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians than other students. Cannon surveyed a total of 1055 students enrolled in criminal justice majors at four universities and found a similar level of negativity towards gay and lesbian individuals. [7] Lambert et al. found that student attitudes towards gays and lesbians tended to become more positive towards the completion of their undergraduate studies, suggesting that education had a positive impact on attitudes to gays and lesbians. [8] A Canadian study of heterosexism among social work students found a significant level of heterosexism that was not moderated by the undertaking of social work courses.[9]

While some disciplines in Australia are starting to address the need for raising awareness of sexuality in the university classroom – teacher education courses are

most notably prominent in this[10] – and there are several dedicated courses on sexuality, many disciplines do not incorporate issues surrounding sexuality into their curriculum, or do so only cursorily. Criminal justice courses, in particular, seem to be silent for the most part on issues of sexuality. This is disturbing, given the research showing relatively higher levels of homophobia amongst criminal justice students than students in other areas. Olivero and Murataya,[11] for example, surveyed 264 undergraduates and found a higher incidence of homophobia among law-enforcement students, reinforcing previous research that found that police officers entertain more misconceptions about queer individuals than the average citizen.[12]

As such, this article explores the ways that undergraduate students engage with discourses surrounding homosexuality and how they reconcile those with other discourses that inform their thinking. This is important, as it can provide some insight into the way that future criminal justice professionals might interact with social minorities, or even those with different backgrounds, in their professional lives. It examines a cohort of undergraduate criminal justice students undertaking a compulsory unit that teaches social and professional ethics, and analyses the students' interactions in the classroom, their own personal reflections on the issues, and their engagement with the learning materials of the unit. In particular, it uses student engagement with a fictional story titled *The Window* (written by Hayes and used as a starting point for incorporating sexuality and social justice issues into the class content) as a basis for an exploration of this engagement. It charts student reactions to this text in personal reflections and ensuing class discussions, and draws out common themes apparent in these responses. These discourses generally show that while students were outwardly tolerant of non-heterosexualities, they still felt uncomfortable about potentially being drawn against their will into what they saw as 'otherness'.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual approach taken in this analysis draws from Foucault's work on discourse and the history of sexuality. He suggested that people are governed by, and shape their own subjectivities, thoughts, and actions according to, the various discourses with which they engage in their everyday lives.[13] In particular, with regard to sexuality, Foucault argued that, historically, people have come to 'know' and understand themselves and others as having an 'essential' and 'natural' sexuality. He

outlined the effects that this has in relation to social interactions and forms of governance. The historical analysis Foucault undertook on social discourses on sexuality and their effects on our understanding of the subjectivity of people are particularly relevant for this discussion.

Prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the regulation of sexuality involved the prohibition of certain *acts* (such as sodomy), no matter who participated in them. However, in the mid nineteeth century, medical and legal discourses took sex as their object and created the category of 'homosexual', and, by extension, created the category of 'heterosexual'. This distinction positioned the 'heterosexual' as the norm, and the 'homosexual' as a pathological or deviant other, in need of some form of correction. Those who failed to conform to the norm were diagnosed, labelled, and then 'treated for' or 'reformed' of their sexual deviance.[14] Thus, the focus of social regulation was not on acts themselves, but rather on distinct *kinds of person*. Sexuality became tied to a person's identity, and the idea that people have an essential sexuality (and, indeed, an essential self) has been widespread ever since.

Homosexuality has become tied to identity to such an extent that it is seen to form the individual's essential nature; indeed, the homosexual individual just *is* their sexuality.[15] Modern individuals are increasingly governed by, and come to govern themselves through, these standards and categories. Those defined as 'homosexual' understand themselves by using these discourses on sexuality, recognising that they 'have' a sexuality, and that this defines them as a person. These are produced and reinforced in established sites such as the social sciences, medicine, and psychiatry.[16] This creation of authoritative categories of sexuality, the normalisation of heterosexuality, and the subsequent casting of homosexuality as opposed to heterosexuality, has produced numerous contradictory and condemnatory discourses. At the same time that homosexuality is not to be spoken of, it is also the object of discourses that name, categorise, judge, and speak on behalf of those who fall within its purvey.[17] These discourses, which Sedgwick so neatly describes as the 'epistemology of the closet', serve to silence and to govern non-heterosexualities, as well as to essentialise them.[18]

This particular approach to sexuality has provided the basis for innumerable analyses of the way in which non-heterosexual (and even heterosexual) identities are constructed through interaction with these discourses on sexuality, as well as how these identities are continually performed.[19] It has also led to similar research on other

supposedly ‘natural’ aspects of identities, such as gender and race. In many respects, this approach to understanding sexuality and sexual identity as positioned through discourse underpins this current research, as this article is interested in the way that these understandings of essentialised sexuality feature as part of classroom interactions and discussions, and the effect this has on the way students interact with non-heterosexualities and even understand their ‘own’ sexuality. It is also interested in the other discourses used in the classroom to police, perform, position, and interact with sexualities.

Methodological Considerations

Previous research on student attitudes has usually taken the form of surveys in order to gain an ‘accurate’ or ‘representative’ understanding of student attitudes toward sexuality, generally so as to describe, infer, or compare and contrast those attitudes. The research undertaken here differs, as it is more exploratory in nature – an ethnography aiming to examine how students construct their understanding of sexuality and how the introduction of non-heterosexist, specifically gay-themed course materials in the classroom might impact on those constructions. It examines the discourses that students engage with as a basis for forming their beliefs and attitudes about gay identity. The university classroom is a powerful site for conducting research of this kind, not only because it provides a rich context in which students are able to express their views and understandings of the issues, but also because it enables the researchers to consider whether and how student attitudes develop and/or change over the several months which they devote to their learning in the course. It is also an opportunity for students to discuss issues in depth, and allows the researchers to discern the discourses used to speak about and understand sexuality (and how students interact with these).

The research was conducted by the unit instructors in the classroom setting provided during weekly tutorials in a core first year social ethics unit, as part of a criminal justice curriculum.[20] The unit introduces students to ethical theories and puts these theories into broader social, legal and criminal justice professional contexts so that students may understand the philosophical and theoretical basis for professional codes of conduct. The majority of the class of 129 internal students were drawn from a criminal justice degree (n=87) and a criminal justice/law double degree (n=28), with a few students (n=14) from other faculties/disciplines taking the class as an elective. Each week, the students were required to read unit materials, including *The Window*, and to engage with those materials through discussion, written reflections, group work, and

assessment. *The Window* is a thirteen-chapter story about the experiences of four young people just beginning their university studies.[21] The main character of *The Window* is a young man straight out of high school, who begins to question his sexuality. The plot traces the challenges he faces in acknowledging and accepting his homosexuality and how he reconciles that with his self-identity. The experiences of gay characters provided the main material for discussion of sexualities and thus, the findings of the research are confined to referring to gay identities for the most part. There was some limited discussion concerning lesbians in one tutorial, and in another, the case of a transgender (female-to-male) pregnancy was also discussed briefly. The discussion of lesbian identity is analysed in the findings, however, the discussion of the transgender pregnancy was so limited, it did not provide any useful material for analysis and so has been omitted.[22]

Students were required to read one chapter of *The Window* per week, to discuss the issues in tutorials, and write weekly reflections on the unit content. The written reflections provided students with an opportunity to reflect on what they had learned from the discourses with which they were engaging, and whether the students felt that this had had some effect on them. The teachers also kept a journal of their reflections on each class. Additionally, at the end of semester, students were requested to provide anonymous written feedback on the unit, as well as the formal feedback obtained through the University's online Learning Experience Survey (which students complete about two-thirds of the way through the semester). This feedback, together with the students' written reflections and the instructors' journals, provided the materials analysed in this project. These materials were read for any discussions of sexuality.

Research was carried out over the course of the semester to determine the impact of this change in curriculum on students' conceptualisations of homosexuality.[23] It was found that, while students' constructions of homosexuality is essentially heteronormative (that is, informed by discourses that privilege heterosexuality) by contextualising the experience of homosexuality in a way that students could relate to, such as through a work of fiction, some students were able to critically reflect on their own values and beliefs and recognise the impact of heteronormative discourses on them.

Findings and Discussion

Several key themes emerged from the research, providing some crucial insights into the ways in which students conceptualise gay identities. These included 'sanitised' tolerance, the threat of male intimacy, fear of contagion, the negation of a gay masculinity, and the casting of gay as other. These themes overlap in many respects, but are separated here for analytical clarity. They allow for an examination of some of the ways in which students engage with discourses on sexuality, and the ways this can shape their interactions with others and with themselves.

'Sanitised' tolerance

Generally, students' reflections and comments in discussing sexuality were positive, expressing a liberal tolerance for, and appreciation of, gay identities. The use of *The Window* proved to be beneficial in contextualising the issues for students, as many of them said they could relate to the characters and their experiences as new university students. At the beginning of semester, some students expressed surprise at the content of the story (i.e. the focus on sexuality), but, by the second or third week, were accepting of it.

> *…discrimination on the basis of sexuality is illegal and wrong…*

> *The Window… challenged my own notion of truth because reading the first half of Dan's story convinced me he wasn't homosexual, but reading Tom's side of the story we see a bigger window open up about the truth about Dan and the war within himself. I found myself in the tutorial discussion leaning my sympathy much closer to Dan.*

> *My view is that the gay community is being blamed for something that institutions need to accept rather than look down upon.*

> *It saddens me that in Australia today, homosexuals are treated unfairly and have to fight for equal rights.*

From the first tutorial and reflection exercise, students were supportive of the gay characters in the story, showing empathy towards them. *The Window* opens with the main character, the previously 'straight-identifying' Dan, privately agonising about his

first sexual encounter with the openly gay character, Tom, at a club. Students were asked how they felt towards these two characters.

> *I sympathised with both Dan and Tom over their 'situation' and Dan's confusion. After having read the two boys' different perspective of the same incident it helped me to appreciate the way people can have diverse versions of the truth although both truths are based upon the same facts.*

Indeed, even the students who admitted to being morally antagonistic to homosexuality seemed to be able to appreciate the characters' points of view.

> *I became more aware that I was judging Tom because of his sexual orientation that came into conflict with my moral ethics. As I tried to put my own values aside, it became easier to judge Dan and Tom's situation more clearly, so I began to drift towards sympathising with Tom [the openly gay character].*

Note, however, both students' reference to Dan and Tom's 'situation'. While clearly empathetic to their issues, these students found it difficult to put into words the fact that Dan and Tom had engaged in a sexual act (which afterwards had negatively affected Dan's self-image and is therefore the crux of their 'situation'), preferring instead to sanitise or gloss over the event by not speaking directly to it, and in the first example, by encasing it in inverted commas.

As the semester progressed, students continued to express more tolerant views of the characters and issues of sexuality as they arose in class, with many students reflecting that they did not realise how often, and to what extent, non-heterosexual individuals were discriminated against.

> *In the future, I hope that homosexuals will begin to feel equal amongst their heterosexual counterparts, and endure less discrimination in their lives.*

As outwardly progressive and accepting as this comment is, it still engages with the discourses on sexuality mentioned previously. That is, it still positions 'homosexual' as 'other', and sexuality is still utilised here as the major lens through which people are seen and understood.

Threat of male intimacy

Despite the liberal tolerance of homosexuality, a small number of students found *The Window* confronting enough to comment negatively on it. These students found the discursive content of *The Window* challenging because it questioned a deep-seated alliance with, and acceptance of, opposing, strongly heteronormative discourses. In chapter four, for example, the main character, Dan, admits he is attracted to the openly gay character Tom. One scene describes the two boys kissing and lightly touching above the chest. In later chapters there are also several scenes where brief reference is made to fairly innocuous touching or kissing. In all cases, both boys are completely clothed and there is no overtly sexualised description of intimacy. However, several students described such scenes as 'too explicit', 'too graphic', 'too sexual', 'too challenging', or 'went too far'. One student complained that 'there was too much sexual description' and another commented that *The Window* should be rated MA.[24] The descriptions of the intimate moments between Dan and Tom are fairly brief and are more focused on how they are feeling rather than what they are doing. There are no explicit sex scenes or references to sex in the story at all, although it is implied.[25]

This suggests that it was not the act of kissing itself that was considered shocking, but rather the fact that the act was being performed by two males.

> *…some of the sexual issues were too graphic and I believe it was unnecessary to talk about it that much.*
>
> *…I don't think it was necessary to be so explicit when describing Dan and Tom's sexual encounters….*
>
> *I found the vivid descriptions of the intimacy between Tom and Dan very hard to take.*
>
> *It was a little bit graphic – there seemed to be a lot of sexual description!*

That a simple kissing scene that would be acceptable in any mainstream media (if between a man and a woman) could be construed as 'sexually explicit', would seem to

indicate at the very least a discomfort with male intimacy.[26] Indeed, the following comment is instructive:

> *…I found it very confronting and sometimes uncomfortable. Reading for me forms a close connection with the characters and as such I didn't enjoy reading it.*

Descriptive content is meant to convey the scene to the reader's mind, to allow them to imagine more clearly what is going on in the story. Here, the student is clearly fearful of what they are seeing in their mind's eye when they read about Tom and Dan kissing or being intimate. This was borne out by several students' comments during the last tutorial. One male student commented that the story made him fear that he would 'wake up gay' one day, because the story begins with Dan questioning his orientation as a 'macho' footballer after his homosexual encounter in a club the previous weekend.

> *I don't know… it's like, when I read I get this image in my head. I kind of see what I am reading. And I don't want to imagine what two men do together… it's just (throws hands up in repulsion)…. It's just… what if I find it [erotic]? That would just be (makes noise of disgust)… that would make me gay.*

He added that if a 'straight footballer type' like Dan could 'suddenly' be gay, then it could happen to anyone, and that this was something to be feared. The association of finding an image erotic causing changes to one's personal sexual identity was confirmed by the other males in the class.

For students, this particular example brought to the fore the idea that sexuality might not be as stable as it is commonly held to be. When faced with the possibility that forms of identity were slippery, and that identities could change partly on the basis of engagement with different discourses, some students appeared concerned or uncomfortable. For someone who holds to the idea that they have an essential self, that their sexuality (whether heterosexuality or homosexuality) is a natural part of them, and who defines themselves in opposition to identity categories that they understand as 'other' and 'not normal', this can be a daunting and discomforting prospect. It has the potential to break down the idea that heterosexuality and homosexuality are distinct identity categories. As such, it can be suggested that many students wished to hold onto

the historically constructed distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, rather than entertain other possibilities.

Interestingly, neither males nor females felt confronted by the idea of two women being intimate – a very brief mention of which occurs in the last chapter. In fact, it was suggested by several of the male students that they would find two females together erotic and not at all challenging. Clearly, the discourses regarding masculinity and femininity and the performance of gender held by male students come into play here. In many cases, to put it simply, males see that football/sports and having sex with women are central aspects of masculinity. This suggests that, in their view, women are (at least partly) to have sex with, but they are also sex objects in their own right, for men's enjoyment, apart from heterosexual intercourse. They are objects of desire, fantasy, and sexual gratification. So even when women choose to eschew men sexually, men can still invoke their masculinity by co-opting what would otherwise be purely feminine space for their personal erotic gratification. This corresponds with research that indicates that lesbian sex acts are one of the most popular content forms of pornography aimed at a heterosexual audience[27] (although Butler notes that lesbian scenes are usually seen as just a prelude to heterosexual love scenes, suggesting that men view lesbian sex as a 'warm up' to 'real sex'[28]). Furthermore, the female students in the class did not appear to be bothered by the male students' comments, which could indicate that they were comfortable with, or at least not insulted by, being the objects of male sexual desire and fantasy.

Fear of contagion

A large number of students often stereotyped gay individuals in general, and the Tom character in particular, as predatory. For example, in the scene where Dan first encounters Tom in a club, Tom walks up, introduces himself, and asks Dan to dance. Dan declines, they chat for a while, then Tom suggests they meet out the back of the club.[29] Many of the students found Tom's behaviour predatory, claiming that he was taking advantage of Dan, because he knew Dan was 'straight' (Dan had said as much).

> *…Tom didn't respect [Dan] in the club by taking him outside and taking advantage of him.*

Other students thought Tom was too much 'in Dan's face' or 'taking advantage' in the club, and that, because Dan declared he was straight, that Tom should have backed off and left him alone. However, this ignores the part of the story in which Tom later turns to find Dan 'raking his eyes over' him 'with appreciation', which indicated to Tom that Dan's words did not match his feelings; that, in fact, he was attracted to Tom. However, many of the students believed that if Tom had not encouraged Dan to meet him outside, Dan would have remained straight.

Here we see how students fear that simply being confronted by homosexuality – having it 'thrown in your face' as it were – is enough to 'turn' a person gay. The discourse underpinning such beliefs points to the construction of gay as contagious, something to stand back from, or, at the very least, something of which to be wary.[30] In this case, the discourses that position homosexuality as deviant have come into play in the way students 'read' the situation, and the way they react to it.

Gay masculinity

The male students also found it difficult to reconcile the idea of a football player being gay. This provides an opportunity to demonstrate the way that discourses on gender identities and their relation to sexuality also play in the students' reactions. In the eyes of these students, gay men are 'effeminate', not 'macho'. Gay men do not play football, nor are they masculine, at least in the same way that heterosexual men are masculine. Rather, gay men are more likely to engage in 'feminine' pursuits.

We as a society have a general consensus that if a man dances he is gay.

Connell argues that typical heterosexual masculinity is characterised to varying degrees by 'the domination of women, competition between men, aggressive display, [and a] predatory sexuality'.[31] A gay man does not dominate women; rather he allows himself to be dominated, the act of sodomy being the ultimate symbol of feminine submission.[32]

Students' tutorial comments reflect these suggestions from the literature, with several adding that Tom is the 'female' in the relationship. For example, one young woman observed that Tom was the 'female' in the relationship and therefore he was the 'good' one.[33] This could be further reinforced because Dan comes across as the traditional masculine male, so he must therefore be the 'man'.

This suggests that Dan's pseudo-heterosexual masculinity requires that he be the one to take his sexual pleasure from another, rather than allowing himself to be taken, at least in the eyes of some students. However, Dan also gives up a part of his masculinity by eschewing the domination of women and by bowing out of male competition for women. Dan forfeits his power and in doing so, forfeits a central part of his masculinity.[34]

It is the crossing of that line of masculinity that makes Dan's sexuality so confronting. Dan's masculinity appears to take a dive, in the eyes of the male students, when he moves from being the subject of sexual gratification to being the object of it for another man. He becomes 'other,' much as women are considered to be 'other,' even if he *appears* to perform masculinity the way heteronormative mores require.[35] Tom's masculinity, on the other hand, is completely surrendered in the students' eyes, because (in the story) one of the characters remarks that Tom 'looks gay' – that is, effeminate. So Tom does not even have the appearance of masculinity to save him from being 'other.' This suggests that the discourses on masculinity with which the students (both male and female) have engaged when performing (or interacting with) gender have enabled them to create the gay identity as the opposite of masculinity; that is, as essentially feminine.

Gay as 'other'

Although students on the whole reacted positively to *The Window*, the unit resources, and discussions about gay identity, analysis of the reflections and responses that students provided revealed a central theme underlying their attitudes and beliefs. Gay identity was tolerated, accepted, and even celebrated in a very few instances, but throughout the semester it was clear that the students constructed gay as 'other', as apart from 'normal,' and therefore deviant. This theme speaks to the suggestion within the literature, as discussed above, that homosexuality is positioned as opposite to, and therefore negatively defining of, heterosexuality. The heteronormative backdrop framing the everyday thinking and experiences of heterosexual students was evident to such an extent that they found it impossible to distance themselves from it. As Halperin notes, the term 'homosexual' constitutes a distinct and 'stable' category in and of itself only insofar as it acts as a 'means of stabilising heterosexuality':

> [T]he homosexual is an imaginary 'Other,' whose flamboyant 'difference' deflects attention from the contradictions inherent in the construction of heterosexuality; heterosexuality thrives precisely by preserving and consolidating its internal contradictions at the same time as it preserves and consolidates its own ignorance of them, and it does that by constructing and deploying the figure of 'the homosexual.'[36]

A common example of this positioning of homosexual as 'other' was apparent as many students admitted to having personal experiences with gay or lesbian individuals, evidenced by remarks such as: 'I know someone who is gay…' or 'My sister is a lesbian…' or 'We had gay students at my school…' The gay and lesbian family, friends and acquaintances were, however, always regarded as something of a novelty, as a group of people with a set of beliefs that were different from their own, rather than as individuals who just happened to have different sexual preferences. Sexuality was not regarded simply as a matter of taste. The students see gay and lesbian sexuality as actually defining the person – as being at the core of their identity – rather than merely one aspect of it, again utilising discourses that establish heterosexuality and homosexuality as distinct categories of person. This is particularly evidenced in some of their comments.[37]

> ***These people*** *are….*
>
> *Reading The Window… provoked sympathy within me for* ***these people****.*
>
> *I'm not saying Dan and Tom [are] bad* ***because they are gays****…*
>
> *And* ***such people*** *are not necessarily bad….*
>
> *As an openly gay teenager, [Tom] is* ***different from what most people consider 'normal'****….*
>
> *My view is that the* ***gay community****….*

This is in direct contrast to how they view their own sexuality. While most of the students certainly identified as heterosexual,[38] their sexuality was taken for granted, not considered something to think or talk about in itself. That they are straight appears to be a given, so much so that they only begin to think of themselves as having a sexuality when confronted by 'alternative' sexualities such as gay and lesbian. This casting of gay and lesbian as other is central to how they not only construct the gay identity, but also how they understand their 'own' identities (that is, if self-identifying as 'heterosexual', then 'normal' and 'without' a sexuality).

Of course, much of this separation of heterosexual and non-heterosexual is also perpetuated by non-heterosexual individuals themselves, as they continue to construct their own identities and understand their own sexualities on the basis of this social division of sexualities. The need (recognised by 'straight' and 'gay' alike) for the gay individual to 'come out,' to declare one's sexuality to the world at large, and one's allegiance to the 'gay community', reinforces the notion of gay as other, as Foucault so famously points out.[39] For many decades, non-heterosexualities have been silenced and hidden; that the gay community should want to break that silence by standing 'tall and proud,' by protesting against, and standing in opposition to, heterosexuality is understandable. This is resistance to core heteronormative discourses in the most fundamental sense. However, such opposition or resistance only reinforces the socially and discursively constructed dichotomy between gay and straight sexualities. Fewer are those individuals to whom sexuality is not a matter for discussion at all because they see it simply as a construction.

A small number of students (n=4) said they found it difficult to empathise with the characters, their reasoning being that gayness was outside the range of their experience. As one teacher commented in their journal:

> *It was a bit hard to get them to visualise the marginalised feeling of someone in the position of Tom since no one related to the situation.*

The students themselves made such comments in their reflections and written feedback. One student, in answer to the question, 'Did *The Window* help you think more clearly about ethical issues?', replied, 'A little bit, but I could not really relate'. Another student commented in their weekly reflection:

> *It is difficult, and honestly I still have some prejudice which is hard to undo. I don't believe for a minute I would treat anyone who is Gay [sic] or transgender etc any differently to any one from different ethnicity but I can't honestly accept the concept because I am not gay so I don't see it.*

These students expressed intolerance throughout the entire process, as evidenced in their written reflections and final tutorial feedback, although they tended to keep out of discussions, rather than choose to air their views. Again, this speaks to the discursive silence and invisibility surrounding gay identity, which these students employed – albeit unconsciously – as a way of resisting the discourse of tolerance toward non-sexualities that developed and became normalised within the classroom over the course of the semester.

It is also interesting to note that, on the whole, the male students in the class were generally much quieter during class discussions of sexuality, especially during the first half of the semester. As the semester wore on, however, some of the male students did open up a little and offer their opinions on the issue. It is suggested that discourses surrounding masculinity, as outlined above, were responsible for this relative silence. In this case, it can be argued that male students were performing masculinity by not engaging with discussions of homosexuality, and again trying to avoid being drawn into otherness against their will.

Conclusion

While many students were initially surprised or shocked by the content of *The Window* and some of the multimedia resources used in class, most expressed an understanding and acceptance of gay discourses. However, it is clear that more widespread discourses on heterosexuality and homosexuality being distinct identity categories, and the social acceptance of the 'normality' of heterosexuality and the deviance or 'otherness' of homosexuality, informs students' acceptance and understanding of sexuality. In many cases, this creates an undercurrent of fear, discomfort, or ambivalence on the part of students, which can be illustrated by the summary statement recorded in one of the instructor's journals – that 'students have nothing against gay people, but they would not want to be one'. The students themselves were prepared to be accepting of gay-identifying individuals, but they could see that many others in society are not, and that homophobia is a fact of life in a society built on powerful heteronormative discourses.

It is this acknowledgement that creates the framework for the continuation of gay identities and gay discourses as other, and therefore deviant.

In their classroom interactions and discussion, students also continued to express a gendered view of sexual relationships, which appears to be related to the performativity of the gendered body. Students expect heterosexual males to adopt the traditional masculinity characterised by Connell as domination of women, competition with other males, aggressiveness, and predatory sexuality.[40] According to this line of thinking, all sexual relationships must have a dominant/submissive subtext, including gay and lesbian relationships. The idea that two men or two women might have an equal relationship, in which neither act out the role of 'man' or 'woman', was entertained on an intellectual level by some, but was generally not borne out in discussions of, or reflections on, sexuality.

This article has considered the tapestry of discourses that characterise and construct the way in which students in this particular course understood and 'saw' homosexuality. In doing so, it has provided the groundwork for future analyses to consider how these discourses might be altered so as to further challenge students. This research can also be extended to move beyond a consideration of the discourses that students engage with, towards an understanding of how these discourses inform actual practices that students may utilise to exclude (or include) sexualities. The aim of such research would be to produce criminal justice graduates with an ability to appreciate the way their own views on sexuality may perpetuate injustice, and the conceptual tools to potentially address a wider range of social injustice beyond those experienced by sexual minorities, both in the criminal justice system and beyond.

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[1] For example, see Michael Flood and Clive Hamilton, *Mapping Homophobia in Australia*, The Australia Institute, Canberra, 1995; L.S. Jones, 'Attitudes of psychologists-in-training to homosexual women and men: an Australian study', *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2000, pp.113-32.

[2] Abigail Thonemann, 'Teaching against homophobia', paper presented at the *Australian Association for Research in Education* annual conference, Adelaide, 1998; Stacey S. Horn, 'Heterosexual adolescents' and young adults' beliefs and attitudes about homosexuality and gay and lesbian peers', *Cognitive Development*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2006, pp. 420-40.

[3] Patrick C.L. Heaven and Lisa N.Oxman, 'Human values, conservatism and stereotypes of homosexuals', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1999, pp.109-18.

[4] For example, see S.M. Hong, 'Australian attitudes towards homosexuality: a comparison with college students', *Journal of Psychology*, vol. 117, no. 1, 1984, pp. 89-95; D. Austin, S.M. Hong and W. Hunter, 'Some determinants of fear about AIDS among Australian college students', *Psychological Reports*, vol. 64, no. 3, 1999, pp. 1239-44; Anne-Marie Polimeni, Elizabeth Hardie and Simone Buzwell, 'Homophobia among Australian heterosexuals: the role of sex, gender role ideology, and gender role traits', *Current Research in Social Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2000, available online at http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/crisp/crisp.5.4.htm.

[5] For example, see P. Bozwarva, 'Attitudes and responsibilities of nurses towards HIV seropositive clients: a literature review', available online at http://www.ciap.health.nsw.gov.au/hospolic/stvincents/1991/a06.html, accessed November 2008; G.A. Mason and S.A. Tomsen, *Homophobic Violence*, Willan Publishing, London, 1997; C.D. Cunneen, D. Frase and S. Tomsen, *Faces of Hate*, Hawkins Press, Sydney. 1997.

[6] Lois A. Ventura, Eric G. Lambert, Michael Bryant, and Sudershan Pasupuleti, 'Differences in attitudes toward gays and lesbians among criminal justice and non-criminal justice majors', *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2004, pp.165-74.

[7] Kevin D. Cannon, '"Ain't no faggot gonna rob me!": Anti-gay attitudes of criminal justice undergraduate majors', *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2005, pp. 226-45.

[8] Eric G. Lambert, Lois A. Ventura, Daniel E. Hall, and Terry Cluse-Tolar, 'College students' views on gay and lesbian issues: does education make a difference?' *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2006, pp. 1-30.

[9] Keith Brownlee, Abi Sparkes, Michael Saini, Randi O'Hare, Kathy Kortes-Miller and John Graham, 'Heterosexism among social work students', *Social Work Education*, vol. 24, no. 5, 2005, pp. 485-94.

[10] For example, see Kerry H. Robinson, Jude Irwin, and Tania Ferfolja, *From Here to Diversity: The Social Impact of Lesbian and Gay Issues in Education in Australia and New Zealand*, Harworth Press, Birmingham, 2002; L.S. Jones, 'Attitudes of psychologists'. This is not to say that there are no courses specifically directed toward teaching and learning sexuality. Such courses exist in several universities here in Australia. However, these tend to be advanced level courses with a specific focus on sexuality/gender into which students are self-selecting. Our research focuses on a general student population and general university curricula, which do not tend to incorporate issues surrounding sexuality as part of their focus.

[11] J.M. Olivero and R. Murataya, 'Homophobia and university law enforcement students'. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2001, pp. 271-83.

[12] See, for example, J. Arnott, 'Gays and lesbians in the criminal justice system' in J. Hendricks and B. Byers, (eds.). *Multicultural Perspectives in Criminal Justice and Criminology*. Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, 1994: Ventura, et al, 'Differences in attitudes toward gays and lesbians among criminal justice and non-criminal justice majors', pp.165-74.

[13] Michel Foucault, 'Subjectivity and truth' in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, trans. Robert Hurley, The New Press, New York, 1997; see also Matthew Ball, 'The construction of legal identity: "governmentality" in Australian legal education', *Queensland University of Technology Law and Justice Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 444-63, 2007. In Foucault's formulation, discourses provide truths about the world and specific representations of it through which their thoughts are organised and ordered. These discourses do not correspond with an objective truth, but nevertheless take the status of truth. See Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham, *Using Foucault's Methods*, Sage Publications, London, 1999, pp. 34-46.

[14] H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1982.

[15] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Penguin, London, 1998.

[16] David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p.19.

[17] Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990.

[18] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

[19] There is a vast array of literature on sexualities, dominated for the most part by Queer Theory. For example, see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York University Press, New York, 1996; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford University Press, California, 1997; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London, 1990; David Halperin, 'The normalizing of queer theory'. *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2003, pp. 339-43; Richtor Norton, *A Critique of Social Constructionism and Postmodern Queer Theory*, available online at http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/extracts.htm, accessed November 2008; Adam. I. Green, 'Gay but not queer: toward a post-queer sexuality studies'. *Theory and Society* vol. 31, no. 4, 2002, pp. 521-45; Adam Isaiah Green, 'Queer theory and sociology: locating the subject and the self in sexuality studies', *Sociological Theory* vol. 25, no. 1, 2007, pp. 26-45.

[20] This research was conducted in semester 1, 2008 at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

[21] S.L. Hayes, 'The window', unpublished manuscript, 2008.

[22] It should be noted that sexuality was only one of the issues discussed in class. The unit itself covered a broad range of ethical issues, and sexuality provided one context within which students engaged with the unit materials.

[23] Note that almost all students were enrolled in Justice or Law units only, and that a survey of the relevant first year units in both degrees indicated that these methods were unique in the Law and Justice curriculum.

[24] The passages in question are as follows: 'Tom waited a moment, then tried to shrug out of the grasp on his shoulder, but the other boy pulled him closer until he could feel their chests up against each other. He looked down at Dan's face and his breath hitched when Dan opened his eyes slightly and leaned up to capture Tom's lips with his own. Tom panicked and tried to pull away. This was history repeating itself and he really didn't want to lose their friendship. But Dan reached up behind his neck and pulled him back into a lingering kiss. Tom sighed, but gave up resisting and sank into the embrace, wondering how many pleas of regret would be thrown at him in the light of morning.

After what seemed like an eternity, Dan pulled back and opened his eyes. He smiled at Tom who felt himself instantly lost. "I've been an idiot." Dan whispered, bringing his other hand up to stroke Tom's hair. "You're gorgeous. I've been so stupid." Tom closed his eyes then and tried to make sense of what was happening. What did it mean? He couldn't help feeling trepidation – Dan had denied him once already and he didn't know if he could trust him. The cold light of day does strange things to people.

He was brought out of his reverie when Dan's lips ghosted across his again and he felt the other's warm breath mingle with his own, before an insistent hand reached behind his neck once more and pulled him into another warm embrace. Their lips slid languidly against each other, slowly parting to allow the kiss to deepen. After long moments, Dan pulled back again and sighed.

Tom moved his head to rest his brow on Dan's neck. His mind was racing and his body was pulsing with heat. Eventually, he lifted his head and Dan finally opened his eyes again and smiled. "Sorry, I got carried away." But he didn't look regretful – quite the opposite. Dan's eyes smouldered as he gazed up at Tom and it was then that Tom knew he was serious.' Hayes, *The Window*, pp. 41-2.

[25] Granted, the story does contain some coarse language, but not to the extent required for an MA rating, according to the Office of Film and Literature Classification.

[26] It should be noted that it is possible that these students had never been exposed to the romance genre of novels, and that their reaction could have been tempered by the shock of seeing such descriptions. However, even if this was the case, their reactions seemed exaggerated, especially considering that most of the class did not have a similar reaction.

[27] For example, see Cindy Jenefsky and Diane Helene Miller, 'Phallic intrusion: girl-girl sex in *Penthouse*', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1998, pp. 375-85 and Judith Roof, *A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991. In the mainstream media, Charles Taylor also reports that *Brianna Loves Jenna*, an erotic lesbian film, was the biggest selling pornographic DVD in the US in 2002. Charles Taylor, 'Straight eye for the queer gals,' available online at http://dir.salon.com/story/sex/feature/2003/08/27/lesbo/, 2003.

[28] Heather Butler, '"What do you call a lesbian with long fingers?" The development of lesbian and dyke pornography,' in Linda Williams (ed.) *Porn Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham, p.167. But see Noah Berlatsky, who argues that men like lesbian pornography because they want to be one of the women, to discover what it is that is different about the relationship. "[M]y investment in the scene is not just a lust *for* the protagonists, but a lust *to be* them; to gain access to a power and knowledge specifically inscribed in female relationships, which is unavailable to men, and thus all the more desired." Noah Berlatsky, 'Men in women-in-prison: masochism, feminism, fetish,' *Bright Lights Film Journal*, no. 61, 2008, available online at http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/61/61womeninprison.html, accessed November 2008.

[29] It is interesting to note here that, while the story implies that Dan and Tom engaged in some kind of sexual act at this point, many students did not pick up on this. We suggest that this reflects the heteronormative association of sex with home. Since heterosexuals do not need to find outlets for sexuality outside the home, as those in the gay community are often forced to (due to the social stigmatisation and resultant estrangement of gay sexuality from the home), the students' naiveté is understandable.

[30] Steven Seidman argues that social mores depict homosexuality as contagious in order to exercise social control over sexuality, to ensure that procreative sex dominates and that homosexual sex is stigmatised. Steven Seidman (ed.), *Queer Theory/Sociology*, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1996. On the contagion of homosexuality, see also Gregory Tomso, 'The queer history of leprosy and same-sex love,' *American Literary History*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2002, pp. 747-75.

[31] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Second edition, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2005, p. 31.

[32] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, New York, 1990.

[33] Source: teacher's journal. The actual quote is "…one young woman suggested that Tom was the 'female' of the two so it would follow that he was the 'good' one!"

[34] Peter M. Nardi, ' "Anything For a Sis, Mary': an introduction to gay masculinities', in Peter M. Nardi (ed.), *Gay Masculinities*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2000.

[35] Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

[36] Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 43-4.

[37] The emphasis in bold is the authors'.

[38] It should be noted that only one male student identified himself as gay in reflections and class discussions. Three students openly stated that homosexuality went against their own personal morality.

[39] Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Volume 1*.

[40] Connell, *Masculinities*.